

2007 State of the Parish

Before we get started, I would like for you all to look at the screens as we pay tribute to a man that gave several years of public service to this community. Duson Mayor John Lagneaux passed away on February 5th after courageously battling cancer. I met John when I was campaigning and had the good fortune to work with him for three years. He worked hard for his community that he loved so much, and never quit fighting for it. My only regret is that we were unable to do more for him. I want the people of Duson to know that he never let up in his efforts with us to get more for you. He also never lost his sense of humor and was always a gentleman. Mayor, you will be missed. I believe we have some of his family here today...would you please stand.

First, let me thank The Independent for giving us the opportunity to be together for the fourth time over the last three years for my State Of The Parish Address. And, in case this is my last time up here, I would like to thank all of you for being here and allowing me to be a servant of the people of this community.

And, let's not forget what today it is. Happy Valentines Day to all the ladies in here, especially to my wife and daughters. One who couldn't be with us today because she just delivered our new grandson late last night. My five foot daughter delivered 10lb 3oz Braxton Kyle Broussard, who should be walking in any minute while Natalie is resting.

I would also like to ask all elected officials in the audience to please stand up and I thank you for coming again this year.

OK, we have a lot to discuss, so lets get started.

A year ago during the State of the Parish presentation I spoke of the "new normal" for Lafayette. A new normal that was and is still partially defined by the wake left from two historic hurricanes.

It was then that I discussed briefly two proposals that would be presented to the people of Lafayette. One of them was a sales tax proposal for immediately beginning work on roads, drainage and traffic improvements, and the other was a vote on giving us the authority to sell more bonds when practical.

As we all know, in November the new tax proposal was not approved by the voters. There are many reasons why, and of course there have been many reasons and post-election theories and advice, as you can well imagine.

But, I believed then as I do now that the over half a billion dollars that plan would have provided in improvements to our public infrastructure would have made a significant difference in the everyday lives, as well as the economic future of Lafayette.

I believed that in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita our infrastructure needs would not be the priority for the state that we need it to be. So, rather than sit back I asked if you wanted to "jump start" the process.

Even with the unveiling that the State, at that time, had a billion and half dollars in surplus and now the figure could be much higher, Lafayette's infrastructure needs have yet to become a high priority for state funding. It is a real issue and it will not go away.

However - neither will we. Work did not stop and will not stop; our goals did not end and will not end; and we are as committed to moving forward with infrastructure improvements with the same conviction we have always held. It will take longer, it will be tedious – but we will do it.

And that determination is what has always made Lafayette strong. Setbacks do not deter us – in fact, it sometimes seems that we in Lafayette are strengthened in our resolve when we face adversity.

We heard the decision by voters. No new taxes. Use the revenue stream we now have - even if the needed improvements take longer to accomplish.

I want YOU and all of Lafayette Parish to know and understand – I heard you and we will continue to build an even better parish on the monies we have available to us. All one has to do is drive around the parish to see the massive amounts of construction and improvement work underway. While we do not have the money we would have had from a new tax, we can continue to work to expand our infrastructure, and continue to work on our traffic and our drainage problems.

And, here are some of the important projects we have under construction right now.

- Intersection improvements at Ambassador Caffery and Ridge Rd.
- Camellia Boulevard extension
- Eraste Landry Rd. extension
- Louisiana Ave. extension
- Rue de Belier extension
- South Domingue extension
- West Pont des Mouton
- Long awaited improvements to La Neuville Rd.
- We have doubled the amount of money this government usually spends on routine street overlay projects.

As a result of the new bond authority approved by voters in July, I am also announcing plans to sell an additional 19-million dollars in bonds to undertake 10 important road, drainage, and traffic improvement projects over the next 2 years. These projects include:

- The first phase of a new bridge project across the Vermilion River at South College, from Pinhook to Kaliste Saloom Rd. (*Our match for state funds*).
- The first phase of I-10 Frontage Roads,
- Additional drainage improvements for Broadmoor Coulee, Coulee Ile Des Cannes, Sunbeam Coulee, and Walker Road.

These are projects that touch everyone in Lafayette, and all will be done without new taxes.

Your message to me was to keep pressing for our fair share of state and federal funds to build out our infrastructure. I am continuing that work that we began as soon as I took office in 2004. With the assistance of the Lafayette Legislative Delegation, we are proposing the existing state sales tax on motor vehicles BE DEDICATED FOR LOCAL projects. ALL cities and parishes would share this money that currently goes undedicated into the state's general fund.

Shortly after meeting with The State Treasurer, I invited our legislative delegation to meet with him in my office to hear about this potential source of money for roads. As a result of that meeting our delegation is leading the effort to return these funds where they belong... to the parishes, cities, towns and villages that could use this money to improve Louisiana's roads... the worst roads in the nation.

For Lafayette Parish, this would generate about 11-million dollars annually for road construction, WITHOUT RAISING YOUR TAXES AT ALL.

Just last night, the City-Parish Council agreed with my recommendation to seek federal funds for several key projects, with the help of our governmental affairs consultant on Capitol Hill. Those projects include:

- I-49 Connector
- Construction of modern traffic roundabouts
- Frontage Roads
- Improvements to deteriorating parish bridges

Aside from traffic issues, I also committed to you that I would work as hard as possible to be Lafayette's best salesman. I am proud to say that we have made great strides this year; in fact we have made history. The City-Parish Council approved, for the first time, our recommendation for the creation of TIF Districts where a portion of the sales taxes collected by the city and the state, will remain inside those districts, sparking economic development and improving infrastructure. It's already working. That state money will now be staying in Lafayette.

Stirling Properties has undertaken a 48-million dollar retail shopping center development in the TIF District at Louisiana Avenue. Finally, because of the TIF District, economic development is beginning to take shape at Lafayette's most eastern gateway.

And.... there's NuComm. A Canadian-based firm that could have chosen any city in the world to expand its business, but it chose Lafayette. NuComm CEO and founder Real Bergevin says Lafayette's technology initiative, including the LITE Center on the U-L Campus and especially, our Fiber to the Home project was the driving force behind his decision.

That, placed Lafayette ahead of the 200 cities they considered. The result is a 1,000 job call center, located in a building that had been vacant for more than 5 years. True economic development is happening in our parish. Unemployment is at an all time low, property values are up, and the growth is continuing. In fact, LEDA reports 2006 was the best year for economic development in Lafayette's history.

Last year, I discussed the concept of Smart Growth with you, and the need to begin the process of developing a Smart Growth code, that recognizes traditional neighborhood development, as well as high-density mixed use development.

During this past budget year, the City-Parish Council agreed to provide funding for a Smart Growth consultant and we are in the process of selecting that person or firm that will help us move forward. This will not be easy because as we all recognize even the thought of change can bring anxiety for some. People have different views of what Smart Growth is but regardless of the definition it means some changes. But change is a certainty.

We have the opportunity to get ahead of the process, and help define it for ourselves so that we can compete for what this community deserves, and with the assurance that the character and strength of our community remain constant.

Without change we become complacent and stagnant, and that is no way to compete in this global economy. The good news is, we have the ability to make some strides this year. We have been discussing our LINC Study for several years. It is time to take it to the next level, and with the help of the planning commission, believe we can make LINC our guide for Smart Growth.

We are not utilizing our existing infrastructure like roads, utilities, and drainage to their full capacity. A Smart Growth Code is an important step in achieving more efficiency. Another important initiative we have already begun is the formation of a Land Bank.

Both Smart Growth and Land Banks are nationally recognized approaches based upon the common sense notion that it is more expensive to support urban sprawl than it is to use our existing properties more efficiently.

For years, we have been successful in demolishing blighted and abandoned properties. But we have not been successful in returning those properties to productive use.

Fortunately, we do not have to reinvent the wheel to solve this problem. Instead, we are taking advantage of more than thirty years experience in St. Louis, Cleveland, Atlanta, and Flint, Michigan to develop our own Land Bank program.

For instance, it is estimated that Lafayette Parish has an inventory of somewhere between 600-900 tax delinquent, abandoned and blighted properties. Through a Land Bank program, these properties can be inventoried and returned to marketable title for use in redevelopment of existing neighborhoods.

Using these properties for our infill program means giving families a hand up to home ownership, thereby instilling the sense of pride and community commitment that comes with owning your own home.

One promise I made when I became city-parish president was to eliminate wasteful spending in government, to eliminate jobs that are not necessary, to “run it more like a business.”

While I am not satisfied with where we are, we knew that changing the culture of government would take time. I will tell you that with the help of our department directors and the City-Parish Council, we are making some great strides.

The first was the conversion of a “data processing” division to a full fledged Department of Information Services and Technology. It did not make much sense that a 2,200 employee business did not have an I-T Department. Now we do, and we have worked to eliminate unnecessary service contracts, duplication of efforts, while taking advantage of the efficiencies that technology offers. By the way, our CIO reports this government prints about a half-million fewer pages than we did 3 years ago, thanks to the use of technology. Our website is under construction to make it ONLINE rather than us staying INLINE. In fact virtually every major technology system running your government is being upgraded to new, REAL TIME, state of the art systems.

We have eliminated unnecessary upper and mid-level management positions, leftover from consolidating city and parish governments more than 10 years ago saving hundreds of thousands of dollars a year.

These savings have been more wisely applied to positions that provide direct benefit to the citizens of Lafayette when it made sense.

An example would be the creation of an additional crew in the Department of Public Works, responsible for the maintenance of our streets. We did this by eliminating a management position that I knew was not necessary.

Planning, Zoning, and Codes experienced a record construction year in 2006. 2600 permits issued with a value of over \$317 million. 150 new subdivisions and 4500 new lots created. If we don't run this department like a business, and hire the proper number of people to inspect and review plans, our service to our customers will suffer. Is that growing government or is it what any thriving business would do?

Let's talk Fiber. In order for us to proceed with our Fiber project we are awaiting a favorable ruling from the Louisiana Supreme Court which is expected at the end of this month.

I would like to share some interesting facts with you about this long and arduous road that we have been down together. So far we have spent about \$3.5 Million.

Most of that has gone to pay fees due to the challenges brought about by obstructionists that don't care about Lafayette or the will of the people. Let me tell you the "other side of the story." The cost of the project has come down nearly \$8 million, due to the maturing of the industry.

Based on cable rate increases in Baton Rouge that we didn't experience here for two years, we saved this community \$3 million. That is a savings all cable customers enjoyed, even if they voted against our initiative. Competition is good for the consumer and we have proven it.

We have already created jobs. I mentioned NuComm earlier. 578 new employees are already on board, with an average pay + benefits of \$18,000 a year. That equates to \$10.4 million a year economic impact without using any of the usual multipliers.

I said earlier, the CEO told me that our fiber to the premise initiative played a huge role in their decision to locate in Lafayette. When I said that we didn't even have it yet, his response was "the fact that your community is embracing technology so aggressively was important to us."

So, just the hope of our bringing fiber has had a tremendous benefit to our community. The legal battle has been some of the best marketing dollars we could have ever spent. The money we have spent is an investment in our future! So, I ask you today: Should we continue the fight for Lafayette!?

Thank you, I have my marching orders!

Now let me quickly tell you about what we are doing to promote Lafayette. Everyone has heard about what we are doing this year with the Marquis de Lafayette. This past weekend, Lafayette had its first ever hospitality suite at the Washington Mardi Gras Ball.

This was the 50th year of the ball and while larger cities were well represented, and even Lake Charles has been there for 17 years, Lafayette was ignoring the same opportunity to sell itself. We had the French Ambassador help us dedicate our suite, and his presence brought about 50 writers to us.

I can say without hesitation, that we had the most talked about suite in DC. We did you proud. Oh, and by the way, because of the generosity of some of our business community, no tax dollars were used for this first ever hospitality suite.

Safe Lafayette

We can have good roads and buildings, wonderful museums, even achieve true Smart Growth, have great schools, churches, and medical care. But, if we don't feel "SAFE" walking to our mailbox or going to the grocery store, none of those amenities really matter.

True, our community has not experienced the crime and violence at the level of larger cities, but no longer are we the small town of the 1970's immune to such problems.

We still have our charm, our identity, our personality, and our vitality. WE still control our own destiny. WE define our community and WE WILL NOT let the problems associated with large cities and rapid growth, define our future.

The reason you see the people at the head table with me today is because they each play a role and represent others that play roles in keeping us safe.

I invited these men and women up here because today we want to let you know that we are going to work together on an initiative I call "SAFE LAFAYETTE." This certainly is not to imply that Lafayette is not safe, because we are, but we want to be as proactive as is possible to keep it that way.

Just an FYI, the 11 murders that occurred in our city last year were either domestic or drug related. Everyone that died knew their perpetrator. And, while our overall crime rate went up minimally, we did see some crimes like robberies and car break-ins increase with our population increase.

Lafayette is growing, and I believe we will continue to grow for years to come. We should be thrilled that we are being recognized as wonderful place to live. However, we will not lower our standards or sacrifice our community aspirations!

There is no quality of life issue that *everyone* in this community deserves to enjoy, more important than feeling safe.

Of course the first thing we all think of is criminal activity, but there are other components of SAFE LAFAYETTE, such as fire safety and traffic safety.

The entities represented up here today are not all under the jurisdiction of my office or consolidated government. However, they all accepted my invitation to be here to show unity in our goal to make Lafayette the safest place to live and raise a family in the south. That is a lofty goal, but anything less is unacceptable. But, we will not be able to achieve that goal without a community effort. We need you to play the most important role as responsible citizens and by taking advantage of programs like Neighborhood Watch.

And WE can help too, beginning even with the simple things. Tomorrow, and I do mean TOMORROW, I have directed Lafayette Utilities System, with the help of Chief Craft, to literally begin “lighting” up some neighborhoods where crime flourishes in the darkness. Terry Huval told me just minutes ago that funds are available in his budget approved by the council to light up existing poles and that work will begin aggressively tomorrow, so “thank you” to LUS and Lafayette PD.

I-T is also teaming with PD to take us to a new level of crime fighting information. Citizens will be able to map crimes on the internet in just a few months and that system is being installed and tested now.

As I mentioned, the entities represented up here are committed to working together for this community, but I am going to mostly focus on what role LCG can play.

Let’s start with crime. First and foremost we have to get our police department fully staffed. We saw a report this past year about how our department is being run with fewer policemen per thousand people that most departments in our state. Is that the kind of efficiency we want from government?

Don’t forget, it IS government of the people, by the people, and for the people, so we as a community have to decide what we want. When we are short staffed, officers must work longer hours in what is obviously stressful work. That leads to lower morale, safety issues and more turnover.

In other words, we can spend many thousands of dollars training and equipping officers, only to have them leave for more money in less stressful jobs.

I am happy to tell you that Chief Craft's aggressive recruiting efforts are paying off, and we could be down to having only about 5 positions unfilled by this summer as opposed to the 28 when Jim took over as interim chief. But, understand something: these are positions that have been identified and funded. Filling these jobs will not get us to where we need to be on "an officer per thousand basis."

Getting us there will be a continuing effort for us, and we will do all we can to fund additional positions with the money we have and by continuing to make government as efficient as is practical. Notice I said as is practical. We have a business to run, and you are our customers. We are not going to cut positions that result in poor service to our community.

Now while our police department can do their job very well, in difficult times, another component is prosecution. I have directed the City-Parish Attorney through the City Prosecutor to pursue *aggressive prosecution* of OWI charges, and victims' crimes such as damage to property, injury, and theft, as well as underage alcohol consumption.

I have also asked, like the DA's office, that he utilize pre-trial diversion programs to educate and punish offenders, while protecting the criminal record of our youth. And we must do more to protect our children. Two of the goals for this year is to aggressively pursue sex offenders and to work with our legislature on stricter street racing laws.

This administration has to work more closely with the DA's Office and Judges to provide them the resources they need to move criminal proceedings along.

We need to bring back ATAC. That is the Alcohol Traffic Action Campaign. But, the police are only a part of getting drunk drivers off our streets.

To make it worth the effort to our policemen, we will need the help and support of our prosecutor and city judges.

They tell me that 20% of the criminals account for 80% of crime. Chief Craft has identified career criminals as a prime goal of his new administration. *They must know that, in Lafayette, the hard life of crime will mean hard time!*

I would like to see us fund a dedicated, Career Criminal Prosecutor housed inside the police department.

We also need to pass ordinances with some teeth to address panhandling and begging.

We are working on our goal to decentralize our police department and establish neighborhood and downtown precincts, 24/7. As this plan takes shape, we will ask our city-parish council to support our efforts.

We are embracing the use of technology every chance we get such as allowing the public to report on-line. This would allow you to report things that are not so urgent that they would need an officer immediately, but to report things in your neighborhood that are either a nuisance or anything else that needs to be addressed.

There is however, another aspect of the police work we need to talk about. We are going to expect more professionalism from our men and women. We have one of the most respected departments in the state, and we are going to improve that well earned reputation.

Sheriff Neustrom worked hard and got his department accredited just a few years ago. Marshal Picard is interested in working on accreditation for his office and we have set a goal to get our police department accredited.

My hope is that working together, as well as working with the other municipalities in our parish to get them accredited, we could accomplish something that may be unprecedented: having every police department in Lafayette Parish accredited and operating at a level of professionalism and efficiency that will benefit our entire parish.

What does this mean to you and me? It means that every aspect of our department is scrutinized. Every policy and piece of equipment is looked at and questioned. It is not easy, but the return on investment is quality policing for our community.

Sheriff Neustrom told me that the cost to his department has been more than offset by savings in insurance premiums alone, and it reduces the number of lawsuits filed against the department.

I will always give police officers the benefit of the doubt, as well as admiration and respect, because I think they deserve our loyalty for what they do every day and every night.

But, while I am telling you today that this community will not lower its standards and will not tolerate criminal activity, neither will I tolerate bad behavior from our men and women in the police department. I am hopeful that accreditation will help make them even more professional than they already are.

I would like to continue on about other things we are doing in our police department, but want to get on with some of the other aspects of SAFE LAFAYETTE.

LUS has been working with our IT department to continue our effort to develop wireless communications for LUS to be able to communicate with its substations around the city. It makes all the sense in the world to make that wireless cloud available to our emergency services personnel like police and fire.

In fact, proposals went out recently to help us get this community wireless in the near future. This will compliment the wireless cloud installed by our IT department over a year ago in the downtown area.

Our initiative also begins with our own employees of Lafayette Consolidated Government to help promote SAFE LAFAYETTE. I am asking that they be the first 2000 eyes and ears against crime. I am calling on them to use their 2-way radio communications and cell phones and to pay attention to what they see.

In the months ahead, I hope to enlist the help of local businesses, also with large vehicle fleets to do the same. We have companies here with fleets equipped with radios, some that may be competitors of ours in some ways, but the men and women that work for those companies are our neighbors, and I know that we all want to work together for a SAFE LAFAYETTE.

There will be those that immediately cry "Big Brother." To those that would do harm to our citizens I would tell them to think of it as "Big Stick!" I think of it simply as taking our Neighborhood Watch to another level I call "Community Watch."

Our fire department is obviously a critical part of SAFE LAFAYETTE. In addition to fighting fires, our men and women in the fire department are first responders to any injury or life threatening emergency. There is an ongoing program to get smoke detectors into the homes of anyone that requests help. These detectors are paid for through grants our department is awarded from time to time, not taxes.

Another use of technology we have embraced is in traffic enforcement. These much publicized cameras are proven to reduce red light running, and speeding in a community without requiring additional police officers.

This effort will begin slowly, and will grow as we see it working to make our community safer. We will continue to use proven technology as it becomes available for all aspects of traffic enforcement.

The more we can use technology, the more we can free up our policemen so they can be in fighting criminals.

This initiative is not a slight to other cities or neighboring communities. Instead, it is a call to all to adopt this initiative to help make all of Acadiana and Louisiana a safe place to live. And we want to help.

In fact we are in the process of negotiating "Mutual Assistance Agreements" with several of our neighboring parishes to allow our police department to help when we are able. It may not be feasible for a small community to have an officer trained for hostage or suicide negotiating.

Maybe they don't have a SWAT team for that once in several years need. We will be ready to help without having to decide what we can do, or from who we have to get permission when that request is made.

Finally, we cannot do it alone. The people you see up here today need the sustained help and participation of community leaders if we as a community are going to succeed.

We will also need the help of our schools and community minded media in order to succeed. It is going to take the participation of the entire community.

Not just the person sitting next to you, but you. I know the people up here are committed to making this the safest community in the south, especially for our children and youth. We are committed to SAFE LAFAYETTE.

My question to you is: Are You?